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THE LAURA SUNDERLAND

LITERATURE DEPARTMENT
OF THE
WOMAN'S BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

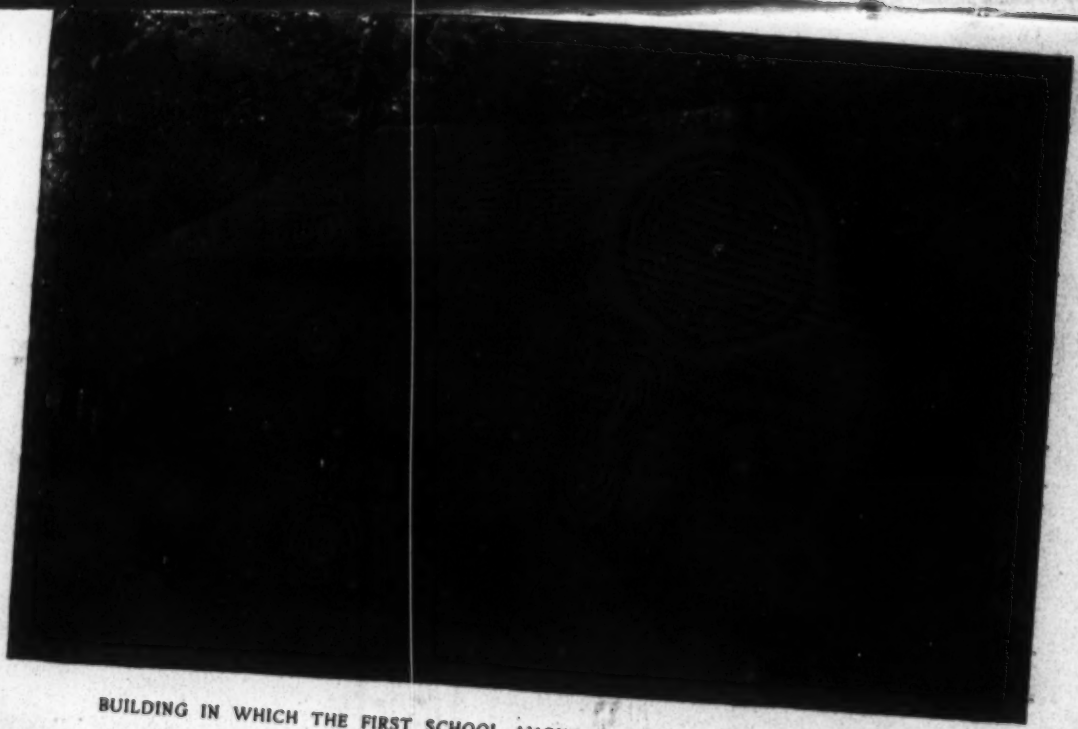
156 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY, N. Y.

The Laura Sunderland.

For twenty years a father and son prayed that teachers might be sent to instruct a long-neglected class—the mountain people of the South.

In answer to that prayer, a school, under the care of the Ladies' Board of New York, was opened in June, 1879, in a small log house (see cut), three miles from Concord, N. C., and, though the neighborhood was forbidding enough and the people almost hopelessly ignorant, yet the teachers succeeded in bringing together twenty-six pupils. Some were anxious to learn, but most of them cared little or nothing for books; but the teachers labored on, striving to create an interest, and the results were most hopeful. A Sabbath-school was begun, then temperance and prayer meetings, and frequent house to house visiting, until the work among the people was an established fact. As time passed on the school grew in interest and in numbers, the homes began to be more cleanly, the children's habits more tidy, and the people in general manifested an interest not only in education but in their spiritual welfare.

In order to meet the increased demands a building was erected near Concord, and forty boarding pupils were taken for any sum which they could pay, the remainder being secured by scholarships. The



BUILDING IN WHICH THE FIRST SCHOOL AMONG THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE STARTED.

log house was retained for the use of a day school for boys and girls. White Hall—the name by which the new seminary was known—rapidly became a center of widespread usefulness, until fire destroyed the building.*

The Home Missionary Society of Baltimore Synod invited Miss Ufford, the founder of White Hall, to address one of the annual meetings and tell of the work from its beginning. After listening to her account of the school, the people, and their needs, the society appropriated the Laura Sunderland Memorial Fund of $5,000 towards a building which should take the place of the one destroyed. An additional gift of $5,000 from the Synodical Society of Pennsylvania secured the erection, in 1893, of the present commodious building, which is called "The Laura Sunderland," in loving memory of one whose life had been devoted to the cause for which the school stands.

The Laura Sunderland is about two miles from Concord and pleasantly located in a picturesque spot, where a wilderness of scrubby pine forms a charming background and a striking contrast to the light sage color and Tuscan red of the building. The entrance is attractive; a broad hall with a library and reception room at the right, an assembly room at the left, school rooms and recitation hall in the rear. The second and third stories, with halls the entire length of the building, contain the well-ventilated

*White Hall was afterward rebuilt and used as the day school department of the Laura Sunderland until that department was transferred to Patterson's Mills, a more needy locality.

sleeping-rooms. The basement, containing the dining-room and kitchen, is well lighted and commodious. The thirty acres of land surrounding the building belong to the institution, one-half of which was a gift.

The school is conducted on the Mt. Holyoke plan; manual labor of every kind is raised to its true standard, in order that the pupils may be practically fitted to keep house, to make their own garments, and in every way become a real help to their own families.

The course of study is sufficiently advanced to enable the students to prepare themselves to teach among their own people; the Bible instruction and religious training being always paramount.

To carry on this work societies and bands are urged to take scholarships in the school, for in many cases it is impossible for the parents to pay even a small sum. A glance at one of the homes as portrayed by a teacher will show how evident this is.

"I was in a home not three miles from our school, a rude log cabin with one room, lighted from the open door and from the flames from the open fireplace. In one end of the room were three beds, with a few shabby garments hanging above them. At the foot of the bed were an old chest, a spinning-wheel, and a large jug. On the old table were a few dishes; beside the door a rude bench, and scattered about the room were five old chairs. On the mantel were several bottles and an old china pitcher. The dingy, smoky walls would have been bare but for a gun, a bag, and a pair of worn boots hanging about.

THE LAURA SUNDERLAND.

Had it not been that the sunshine could creep in through the cracks and crevices all about, it would have seemed more like a prison than a room; and yet, sad to say, this is a home in which lives a father and his three children—the mother is dead. One of the children seemed so proud to show me his Christmas gift, a book, which he had received at the Mission. I have lately visited fifteen other homes and have not seen so much as a newspaper in one of them. The statement must be true, that seventy out of every hundred of these mountain people cannot read. When I think of the appalling fact that there are 300,000 young people of school age, and only 3,000 of these in schools, I can only pray again and again, God help us to help this people."

That the Laura Sunderland is a center of light and influence is evidenced from the following extract from the principal's letter: "I have just been called away from my desk to see a mother and her little daughter, who, as the mother said, 'come ter see if they could git her in.' After assuring them that there was no possibility of admitting the child next year she said: 'Oh, can't I come? I wants to so bad. I likes to larn.' One cannot turn one of these hungering ones away without a wish that our building might be increased to twice its present size; that instead of sixty we might provide for a hundred or more of these who are appealing to us, but we rejoice that we have our classrooms filled with noble, earnest, purposeful girls. One of these, who has lost no opportunity of acquiring an education, although her advantages have been limited, said a few days since,

'Why did I not know of this school long ago? If I had I might know something now.'

"Another young woman, recognizing the privileges she enjoys here, said: 'God has been very good to send me here, and I am almost afraid I shall fail to make the most of every opportunity; but I mean to try, for I have so long wanted an education.' While the intellectual development of our pupils is a constant source of pleasure the evidences of spiritual growth are still more eagerly watched for. We rejoice to see an earnest Christian spirit manifested among our older pupils, whose influence is very marked and helpful among the other girls. Our missionary society and the weekly prayer meetings furnish opportunities for engaging in active work, without which there can be no growth. We began the new year with a series of services, and while there were not many conversions as a result of the meetings there was a deepening of spiritual life throughout the school. Girls who were indifferent and careless have become earnest workers, whose lights are kept brightly shining for Christ the Master."

Does not the Laura Sunderland speak for itself? Are you ready to respond?